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System, Students Criticized by Profs

By BRUCE EGGLER

A national official of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) today criticized attempts by both students and administrators of the Southern University system to infringe on what the AAUP considers proper university government.

Dr. Henry L. Mason, who is chairman of the AAUP's Committee on College and University Government as well as chairman of the political science department at Tulane, made the statements in a letter to Jesse Bankston, president of the State Board of Education.

This is not the first time the AAUP has come into conflict with Louisiana colleges run by the state board. Three of the 30 schools currently on the AAUP's censure list are in Louisiana—Southern, Grambling College and Southeastern Louisiana University.

The AAUP is the nation's largest and most powerful organization of university faculty, with some 90,000 members in 1,250 separate college chapters.

CENSURE IS the AAUP's method of informing the higher education community that conditions violating what it considers proper academic freedom exist at a given college. A censured institution finds it much more difficult to hire top-quality professors or to attract promising graduate students.

Southern has been on the censure list since 1968, Southeastern since 1970, and Grambling since 1971. So far none of the schools has made major efforts to get off the list by correcting the conditions or procedures which the AAUP objects to.

In his letter, Mason pointed to reports of "several summary dismissals of faculty members in Baton Rouge" for their allegel role in the recent student demonstrations there. (Reportedly, six faculty members have been fired by President Leon Netterville.)

Noting the earlier censure of the school, Mason charged that there is not a "healthy academic atmosphere" at the Southern campuses.

Mason, who is the author of "College and University Government: A Handbook of Principle and Practice," also expressed "grave doubts" about some proposals for increased student power at Southern in New Orleans.

HE CRITICIZED proposals for giving students equal authority with faculty and administrators in such academic areas as determining the curriculum and hiring or firing professors. "The status of students as learners," he wrote, "is inconsistent with their full-fledged participation in decisions affecting what they should learn or who should teach them."

Mason expressed sympathy, however, for some of the SUNO students' other grievances, such as the physical shortcomings of the school's facilities, and called for "consultative or advisory student inputs" even in the academic area.

In a lengthy report on the Southern situation in 1968, an AAUP investigating committee declared that the late President Dr. Felton G. Clark ran a "paternalistic system" that did not allow for proper faculty participation in running the university.

The particular case at issue involved the 1967 firing of Associate Professor Charles Walker, a music teacher who was dismissed after charges were made that he had improper relationships with several female students. Walker was not allowed to have a hearing on his dismissal or even to see a written list of the charges.

IN THE WAKE of Walker's firing, three other young professors who had supported his position against the administration were also dismissed. The faculty cases were also interwoven with growing student unrest at Southern, the committee reported.

The committee found that the "paternalistic" system under which the president of the school made policy almost single-handed was no longer workable once Southern, which had only a few hundred students 30 years ago, had expanded into the nation's largest black university. The Baton Rouge campus alone now has approximately 9,000 students.